

THE IDEAL LITERATURE.

MARTIN SHIVELY.

Since the introduction of letters, literature has played a very prominent part in the history and achievements of the world. Science, art, politics and religion have employed this medium as the vehicle to carry their discoveries, their beauties and their truths abroad, and have by its help, been made known every where, thus enlightening, encouraging, civilizing and Christianizing mankind. No one doubts, but that since our Heavenly Father has put this very powerful agent into the hands of His creatures, He certainly intended it to be used for the bettering of the world, for the saving of souls, and to the organizing into one grand brotherhood, the whole human family. The literature of the world has grown to gigantic proportions, but sad to say, taken as a whole, it can not be said to have attained unto the ideal. True, the years as they glide away, consign to oblivion most that is vicious or even worthless, but even during its brief stay it has unchained a host of evil inclinations, and influences, which the generations following must face and fight. The existence of this kind of literature is wholly due to false ideals in the minds of its propagators. It is not enough that it shall be popular for a time, and that it shall enrich its authors and dealers for it is not true that what the people want most, they most require. An editor of a popular journal is credited with having said, "If the people want to hear the devil, the columns of my paper are open for him to make himself heard." Too much of such literature is to be found; such as will readily cater to the baser nature of its readers.

But I glory in the fact, and praise God that there is a true ideal, and that though our progress toward that goal may not be swift, there are yet men and women, and not a few, whose efforts are wholly in that direction, and that the pens they wield, and the products they send forth, are guided by that star which marks the end to all human achievement,—attainment to the ideal.

The ideal literature is first of all

DEVOTED TO PRINCIPLE.

The question is not with it "will it take with the people?" but "Is it right?" Not, "will it pay?" but, "will it do good?"

Apply this test to much of current literature, and it is out of the race at once. Illustrative of this point, take the American saloon, and many other of the evils around us, and note the feeble protest offered against them by the popular press of our country. True the protest is long and loud from many quarters, and would be heard from every where if public sentiment asked it. But it is within the power of literature to manufacture public sentiment and not to follow it. I had rather find our feeble efforts toward enriching the literature of the land, on file in reading rooms of heaven, than to have them lauded by men, and lose the recognition of God. A literature that

DEFENDS THE MAJESTY OF GOD AND THE BOOK.

with its unbroken ethical code, despite the fact that such a course may not be popular, is nearing the point of the ideal. We admire Henry Clay the more, because he could say and mean it, "I would rather be right, than president." So do we admire the more, that literature which stands alone, if need be, in defence of principle.

The ideal literature is moreover, DEVOTED TO THE NEEDS OF MEN.

This has been the all-absorbing idea of our Master, even since man passed from His hand,—the highest achievement of creative genius. (John iii, 16.) He has from the first ordained that men and the instruments they employ, being ruled by this passion, should be beloved by their fellowmen, and by their God. It is the secret of success and enduring fame. And, so the nearer literature approaches the ideal, the more it becomes devoted to the needs of the people to whom it comes. We sigh for a deeper and more practical help, but only when men shall be completely overwhelmed and over powered by the God-given truth that we are brothers, shall the products of their pens and hearts, reach that summit toward which we look with longing eyes. Then shall it reach far out beyond the limits of its old time usefulness, bringing peace and

satisfaction to the troubled, unsaved and dissatisfied mind. And shall the benignant smile of God, and His richest blessing of helpfulness be extended without stint toward it. Then shall Christianity be hailed as a practical, beautiful and efficient religion by the millions around us, who now have no interest in its purposes, and who from sheer disgust with the selfishness of its adherents, make no effort to enlighten themselves as to its teachings.

The ideal literature is furthermore characterized by its

DEVOTION TO GOD.

I am a firm believer in the doctrine, that whatever God has made, and whatever inventions have by Him been made possible, are all designed to bring man to a sense of his dependence upon his Creator. And whenever man has been awakened to this fact, he will become a devoted follower of the meek and lowly Lamb. Since literature plays such a prominent part in the education of men, it is within the scope of its power to enlighten them on this most important subject. To be devoted to God does not only mean devotion to Him as Creator and moral Governor of the world, but to stand for the authority of His word, and for the sufficiency of its plan of salvation. The literature which conforms to the above, is the ideal literature, and is a mighty power among men, proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to an audience unlimited by walls and pews, and bringing glory upon itself and upon the God it serves.

And now my dear Brethren, all this may read beautifully, and even interest you, but know ye, that the ability to make our literary interests such as has been briefly described is ours. We rejoice in the progress already made, but let us not forget that the goal is not yet reached. Heb. xii, 1. describes beautifully all that need be said in this connection. First, our publishing interests must be put upon a sound financial basis, and then with hearts and hands tempered by the spirit of divine love and divine enthusiasm, let us push on, giving to it for publication such thoughts as are in conformity with the ideal, and God will bless our literature, and make it and us a power for the enlightening and saving of our fellow man. Amen.